RESEARCH QUESTIONS
What attitudes do Midwestern college student athletes hold towards gambling? How prevalent are problem and pathological gambling among Midwestern college student athletes?

PURPOSE
The purpose of the present study was to examine attitudes toward gambling among college athletes at three Midwest universities, and to determine the prevalence of problem and pathological gambling in that sample.

HYPOTHESIS
It was hypothesized that demographic and behavioral variables would place some college athletes at a greater risk for developing pathological gambling.

PARTICIPANTS
The athletic departments at three Midwestern universities notified athletes who were members of intercollegiate sports teams of a mandatory meeting. A total of 636 athletes attended the meetings at the three universities (182 at college A, 255 at college B, and 199 at college C). While there, students were offered the opportunity to participate. Two key measures were administered for the study, those being the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) and the Gambling Attitude Scale (GAS), for which there were seven scales. Overall, 620 individuals completed the SOGS, and 556 completed at least one of the GAS scales (average age = 20; 57% males). Seventy-nine percent of the participants were white, and nearly 97% were single. With respect to college class, 29% were freshman, 25% were sophomores, 29% were juniors, and 18% were seniors. Mean grade point average was 3.0. Six percent of the participants were fraternity or sorority members.

PROCEDURE
Participants completed the SOGS and the GAS at the meetings that they attended at the three universities. During the meetings they also answered questions about their gender, ethnicity, college class (e.g., freshman, sophomore), membership in a fraternity or sorority, and current grade point average. Participants were not compensated for taking part.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES
The SOGS assessed whether respondents had participated—at any point in their lives—in 14 specific types of gambling activities; a question about Internet gambling was also added. The SOGS also gauged the probability that the respondent may have been a problem or pathological gambler. Questions were added to gauge the largest amount of money gambled on any one day; whether or not family members or significant acquaintances had had a gambling problem; whether or not the respondent had had credit lines with bookies or casinos; the amount of money owed as a result of gambling; and the age at which the respondent first gambled. The GAS assessed attitude toward gambling in general, as well as specific types of gambling. Political views were added in addition to an Internet gambling scale. There were 9 items for each of five types of gambling, and 21 statements that sought respondents’ political views along a liberal-conservative continuum. Two statements were risk related statements.

KEY RESULTS
When the participants gambled, they were most likely to engage in games of skill (e.g., betting on golf). Although nearly 25% of the participants claimed to have never gambled, nearly 15% had a SOGS score ≥ 3, indicative of problem or pathological gambling. About 20% of the male respondents had SOGS scores ≥3, while only about 5% of the female respondents did. Of respondents who scored in the probable problem or pathological range, all but one started gambling between the ages of 6 and 18. About one-third of the respondents who had engaged in some form of gambling indicated that they had gambled more than they had intended. Average liberal-conservative scores indicated that they had gambled more than they had intended. Average liberal-conservative scores reflected a neutral response, and risk-taking scores were the highest for that population. Finally, those at risk for a gambling problem gambled frequently, had family and/or friends with perceived gambling problems, were non-white, older, started gambling at a younger age, preferred games of skill, and held positive attitudes toward
gambling in general and Internet gambling, in particular.

LIMITATIONS
First, the data were obtained by self-report. Second, the study’s focus on college students at three Midwestern universities should not be considered representative of college students in general. Third, the study assessed lifetime, not current SOGS data. Finally, participation in the study was limited to those who attended the meetings (only 54% of the total number of athletes from the three universities attended the meetings).

CONCLUSIONS
Nearly one in six college athletes who participated in the study had either problem or pathological gambling. Clearly, college athletes constitute a vulnerable group for gambling problems. Specific interventions are needed to target this group.

KEYWORDS: gambling, college student, athlete, gambling attitudes, problem gambling, pathological gambling, youth

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